

Cerebral Palsy

FACT SHEET

What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral means having to do with the brain. *Palsy* means weakness or problems with using the muscles. Cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and keep their balance and posture as a result of an injury to parts of the brain, or as a result of a problem with development. Often the problem happens before birth or soon after being born. Cerebral palsy causes different types of disabilities in each child. A child may simply be a little clumsy or awkward, or unable to walk at all.

What are some of the signs of cerebral palsy?

The signs of cerebral palsy vary greatly because there are many different types and levels of disability. The main sign that your child might have cerebral palsy is a delay reaching the motor or movement milestones. If you see any of these signs, call your child's doctor or nurse.

A child over 2 months with cerebral palsy might:

- have difficulty controlling head when picked up
- have stiff legs that cross or "scissor" when picked up

A child over 6 months with cerebral palsy might:

- continue to have a hard time controlling head when picked up
- reach with only one hand while keeping the other in a fist

A child over 10 months with cerebral palsy might:

- crawl by pushing off with one hand and leg while dragging the opposite hand and leg
- not sit by himself or herself

A child over 12 months with cerebral palsy might:

- not crawl
- not be able to stand with support

A child over 24 months with cerebral palsy might:

- not be able to walk
- not be able to push a toy with wheels

What causes cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy is caused by a problem in the brain that affects a child's ability to control his or her muscles. Problems in different parts of the brain cause problems in different parts of the body. There are many possible causes of problems, such as genetic conditions, problems with the blood supply to the brain before birth, infections, bleeding in the brain, lack of oxygen, severe jaundice, and head injury.

What can I do if I think my child might have cerebral palsy?

You are doing the right thing now – talking with your child's doctor or nurse. If you or your doctor have concerns about cerebral palsy, you can seek the help of a specialist such as a developmental pediatrician or child neurologist, and you can contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older). To find out who to speak to in your area, you can contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities by logging on to **www.nichcy.org/states.htm** or calling **1-800-695-0285**. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has links to information for families (**www.cdc.gov/ncbddd**).

To help your child reach his or her full potential, it is very important to get help for him or her as early as possible!

www.cdc.gov/actearly



Learn the Signs. Act Early.